

OEPP STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS: SPRING 2025



Zixi Fan

Department

Chemistry

Homeland

China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

Chemistry is actually not my favorite discipline. I think I just picked it because I am kind of good at it.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

I gained many useful skills for giving presentations and finishing casual talks. These skills benefit me not only in my academic life but also in my personal life.

What specific language, communication, and presentation skills did you improve on in English 620?

I learned how to organize a good presentation. I also learned how to make a smooth transition between topics, and how to use RAV to answer questions.

What aspects of communication with undergraduate students in English 620 did you find helpful and why?

I definitely learned how to use inclusive language, try to understand their problems and stressors, and try my best to help them out.



Lakshika Karunaratne

Department

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Homeland

Colombo, Sri Lanka

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I discovered my passion for power and energy systems during my undergraduate studies where my attention was drawn to the complexity of modern power systems and their critical role in supporting daily life and advancing global sustainability. What excites me most about this field is how it blends theory with real-world application. Power and energy research involves modeling complex systems using rigorous mathematics, optimizing performance, and exploring innovative approaches to energy integration and flexibility to meet the evolving demand of the future.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

Absolutely. English 620 offers a unique and supportive space to practice and improve communication in an academic setting. It not only builds language and presentation skills but also enhances cultural understanding, which is essential for teaching in a diverse environment.



Fan Ji

Department

Chemistry

Homeland

Shanghai, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I became interested in chemistry during high school. Later, during my undergraduate research, I discovered analytical chemistry and mass spectrometry and was fascinated by their ability to reveal molecular-level information, which led me to pursue graduate studies in this area.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

The most beneficial aspect of English 620 was the chance to practice real classroom scenarios and receive constructive feedback. It helped me become more confident and comfortable speaking in front of students.

What specific language, communication, and presentation skills did you improve on in English 620?

I improved my pronunciation, pacing, and clarity when giving instructions or explaining scientific content. I also learned how to check for student understanding and adjust my language accordingly.

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Cristiane G. Ferrarezzi

Department

**Environmental and
Ecological Engineering**

Homeland

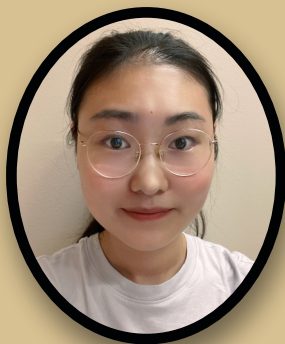
Minas Gerais, Brazil

How did you get interested in your field of study?

With a background in chemistry, I worked in a municipal water and wastewater department, where I applied my knowledge to help prevent pollution and protect local water bodies. As someone who loves nature and wildlife, this work gave me a strong sense of purpose. That experience inspired me to deepen my impact by pursuing a Ph.D. in Environmental and Ecological Engineering.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

With a background in chemistry, I worked in a municipal water and wastewater department, where I applied my knowledge to help prevent pollution and protect local water bodies. As someone who loves nature and wildlife, this work gave me a strong sense of purpose. That experience inspired me to deepen my impact by pursuing a Ph.D. in Environmental and Ecological Engineering.



Rui Zhu

Department

Food Science

Homeland

Shanghai, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I'm a big foodie, and I enjoy exploring those novel food products in grocery stores, reading their ingredient labels, and wondering about the formulations behind them.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

I feel that I am becoming more comfortable and confident in speaking English and communicating with others in daily life. I'm also more aware of my pronunciation and grammar issues, for example, with words like "emulsion" and "Indianapolis", and I am trying hard to improve them. Additionally, I am applying the skills learned from class, such as performing comprehension checks, using transitions between different paragraphs, and incorporating the RAV process during the Q&A sections for those scientific presentations.

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Roy Peña

Department

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Homeland

Cusco, Peru

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I've always been fascinated by how technology shapes our world, and that naturally led me to Electrical and Computer Engineering, where I could dive into solving real-world challenges. Specifically, I'm passionate about semiconductor characterization, where I get to use advanced techniques like electron microscopy to analyze materials at the atomic scale. For me, it's more than just science, it's about being part of something greater, something that impacts the world.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

ENGL 620 has been nothing short of transformative. The safe and supportive environment gave me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone, practice my communication skills, and learn from my mistakes without fear of judgment. It wasn't just about improving my grammar or pronunciation, it was about discovering how to connect with others through language. Weekly meetings, structured feedback, and monthly presentations helped me unlock a confidence I never thought I had. ENGL 620 wasn't just a course—it was a journey of self-growth.



Ahmed Mohamed

Department

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Homeland

Cairo, Egypt

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I have always been fascinated by technology and how it connects people across distances. My interest in communication systems started when I realized how much we rely on these technologies on a daily basis—whether it's sending a text, making a call, or streaming videos. This curiosity eventually led me to focus on wireless communication, a field that plays a vital role in modern life. Over time, I became particularly interested in how artificial intelligence could be integrated to improve the efficiency of these networks.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

I would highly recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs. The course provides essential skills to communicate effectively in academic and professional settings, which are crucial for success as a TA. It emphasizes tailoring language to the audience, simplifying complex ideas, and using tools like visual aids to make presentations more engaging and accessible.



Haixia Zhao

Department

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Homeland

Chongqing, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I discovered the field *coupled infrastructure systems* after accepting Purdue's offer. While this field employs different methodologies and frameworks than machine learning, it captivated me as an opportunity to tackle new challenges. The field addresses complex real-world problems whose solutions could create meaningful impact. Like machine learning, it demands a synthesis of theory and application—I model real-world challenges using rigorous mathematical frameworks, apply advanced analytical tools, develop theoretical insights, and translate complex mathematics into accessible understanding.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

English 620 provided invaluable training in both teaching and communication skills. The course developed my ability to present complex academic concepts in accessible language, interact effectively with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and communicate professionally in various settings. These skills have proven essential, whether I'm engaging in daily conversations or presenting at academic conferences.

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Fangyuan Guo

Department

Industrial Engineering

Homeland

Xi'an, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

Industrial Engineering is a subject at the intersection of applied math, engineering, and business. I would like to be an engineer with business insights, so I got into the field of Industrial Engineering. I'm satisfied with this decision.

What specific language, communication, and presentation skills did you improve on in English 620?

English 620 not only provides me with technical support but also creates a safe environment for us to practice without worrying about being embarrassed. It takes a huge amount of time for international students to get familiar with a different culture. One who looks and sounds smart in their first language may sound less sophisticated when speaking a second language. Not knowing the response strategy even exacerbates the situation. We learned the RAV (repeat-answer-verify) strategy for Q&A, which helps avoid miscommunication and buys presenters time to think over questions. The involvement of undergraduates in the evaluation session and the roundtable discussion also help us gain first-hand feedback from our potential audience.



Sedigheh Fatollahzadeh

Department

**Educational Studies/
Special Education**

Homeland

Tehran, Iran

How did you get interested in your field of study?

As an artist and educator, I began my teaching journey during my undergraduate program. Special education has consistently been a significant aspect of my educational journey, primarily due to my extensive experience working with students with special needs. I strongly believe that art plays a crucial role in improving communication and providing better support to these individuals.

I discovered that my advisor shared the same background, which sparked my interest in pursuing this field further. Integrating my artistic background with this new journey has been incredibly fulfilling, and I am grateful for the path I have chosen. It has been a perfect fit so far, and I am excited about the opportunities it continues to bring.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

Absolutely, this course was incredibly beneficial for me. Just imagine having tutoring and conference sessions with two amazing instructors throughout the entire semester, and all for free!



Haixia Zhao

Department

Educational Studies

Homeland

Hebei, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

Prior to the program of Higher Education in the College of Education at Purdue, my major was Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. Because of that, I interacted with students from all over the world, and I found that their learning progress was not only impacted by teaching pedagogies but also educational systems. Therefore, I decided to expand my area of study to do research on educational issues at both macro and micro levels.

What specific language, communication, and presentation skills did you improve on in English 620?

During this course, I started to pay more attention to the stress of words and the intonation of sentences, which I was not aware of before. And I gradually use more and more English idioms in communication and speak more naturally. The presentation skills that I've gained from this course—expressing myself clearly, using different ways to elaborate main points, and time control—have made me more confident in giving presentations in my major courses and at academic conferences.

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Dohyung Bang

Department

**Hospitality and Tourism
Management/Statistics**

Homeland

Pohang, South Korea

How did you get interested in your field of study?

During my undergraduate years, I traveled to various international and domestic destinations. Amid the captivating beauty and inspiration of these renowned places, I observed two contrasting landscapes that left a lasting impression. What stood out most was the noticeable disparity in the benefits derived from the booming tourism and travel industries, often leading to a widening wealth gap. Motivated by this, I had an opportunity to serve as an undergraduate research assistant for a professor specializing in the applied economics of tourism. This pragmatic experience significantly deepened my understanding of the intricate dynamics of tourism's impact on economies and societies.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

I would like to highly recommend English 620 for incoming international students who will work as teaching assistants. This course not only enhances language and communication skills but also provides an ideal environment to interact with classmates and undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds, broadening their perspectives.



Xinzhi "Aurora" Wang

Department

Computer Science

Homeland

Wuhan, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

There is no fancy story about me choosing computer science. Initially uncertain about my academic interests during my undergrad, I opted for computer science due to its broad applicability and the ease it provides for transitioning between majors.

What did you find most beneficial in ENGL 620?

I found the development of presentation skills and TA training to be immensely beneficial.

What aspects of communicating with undergraduate students in ENGL 620 did you find helpful and why?

The most valuable aspect of interacting with undergraduate students in English 620 was gaining insights into the qualities that define a good TA. This understanding equipped me with the necessary tools to communicate effectively with students and employ optimal methods to facilitate their learning.



Cansu Coskun

Department

**Construction Management
Technology**

Homeland

Ankara, Turkey

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I am an architect with a master's degree in civil engineering. Throughout my life, I have always been interested in the built environment. During my undergraduate education and summer internships, I realized my specific interest in construction management because a lack of effective construction project management might lead to failure in predetermined project scopes due to the unique and complex nature of the construction projects even if the building is well-designed in terms of aesthetic and technical aspects. For this reason, I have decided to specialize in construction management as an academic to explore how to optimize and add value to the current construction management practices.

What aspects of communicating with undergraduate students in ENGL 620 did you find helpful and why?

In this course, I had the opportunity to engage with an audience unfamiliar with my field. I have learned how to mention the big picture and highlight key takeaways from a topic. As undergraduate students have diverse backgrounds and majors, I have also realized the importance of using correct pronunciation and reductions on the field-specified terminology to be sure they can follow me.



Alzahraa "Zoe" Eldeeb

Department

Chemistry

Homeland

Cairo, Egypt

How did you get interested in your field of study?

Throughout my academic journey, I have been captivated by the intricate chemical reactions occurring around us, often unnoticed, such as the vanishing of salt crystals in water or the transformative power of soap and water in cleaning clothes. These phenomena, coupled with my desire to comprehend and explain them, are what truly drew me to the study of chemistry. I firmly believe that the study of chemistry is, in fact, the study of life itself.

What did you find most beneficial in English 620?

Upon arriving in the United States, I eagerly sought ways to immerse myself in the local culture and acclimatize to the American English language and norms. To fulfill this goal, I enrolled in an English 620 course, which proved to be an invaluable steppingstone. This course not only provided me with a solid foundation in English language skills but also offered insights into cultural nuances that helped me contextualize my academic pursuits. Through this experience, I honed my ability to employ speech contractions effectively, comprehend language structures, and develop integrated presentation skills.

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Yuxin Guo

Department

Biological Sciences

Homeland

Zhejiang, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

My father's work is related to designing parks and gardens, and since my childhood, I've always been curious about why flowers have different colors and shapes. Then, I learned in biology class during high school that those characteristics can be determined by genetics. I became fascinated with the function of genes since then, and I'm now interested in how genetics can help explain our vulnerability to complex human diseases.

What specific language, communication, and presentation skills did you improve on in ENGL 620?

By practicing in English 620, I'm able to make complete sentences with fewer pauses and grammar errors, which has helped me communicate more efficiently. I'm also able to use various transitional languages to make a more coherent and organized presentation. With five practice presentations to undergraduate students, I learned strategies, such as asking comprehension questions to engage my audience.



Khalil El Breidi

Department

**Computer and Information
Technology**

Homeland

Palestine

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I became interested in data analysis approximately 15 years ago when I became involved in large-scale work dependent upon statistical models in post-war Lebanon. Despite numerous challenges due to severely underserved resources as a result of the geopolitical conflict in the region, I was driven to learn and apply basic data analytics techniques as a procurement manager.

What did you find most beneficial in ENGL 620?

Ms. Lageveen is a great teacher and an amazing person. I am sure all instructors are good, but from my perspective, Ms. Lageveen ingeniously handled the class and improved us throughout the semester. One of the other things I liked was the pronunciation and idioms journal. That's one thing I will continue working on in the future. Every time I speak with native speakers, I save the new idioms on my phone, so I can add them later to my journal. I use different and simple words daily.



Ruiqi Gao

Department

Computer Science

Homeland

Xuzhou, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

I was taking a course related to my field in my third year of undergrad. The course content is really interesting, and there seems to be a lot of open problems in this field, so I decided my field of study.

What aspects of communicating with undergraduate students in ENGL 620 did you find helpful and why?

During our roundtable meeting with undergraduate volunteers, they gave us a lot of feedback on their expectations of a good TA, those advice are super helpful for me to become a better TA.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international TAs?

Definitely yes. The course is very fun and beneficial, we get to practice not only English oral skills but also presentation skills, these skills are all super important in the TA/Academic life. The instructors and tutors are wonderful and I recommend every international TA to take this course.

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Zhongheng Qiao

Department

Economics

Homeland

Liaoning, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

During my undergraduate studies, my interest in experimental economics was sparked. It was by chance that I had the opportunity to participate in several lab experiments as a subject and earned money from my decisions. At that point, I felt that it was very intriguing to make decisions in the experiments, and I developed a curiosity to delve deeper into the underlying narratives behind these experiments. As I learned more about advanced microeconomic theory, I gradually realized that the combination of theory and experimental methods is just fascinating.

Would you recommend English 620 for incoming international student TAs? Why?

I would highly recommend the English 620 course for incoming international student TAs, because this course helps international student TAs to be more prepared for their teaching duties. Furthermore, students can apply the communication strategies learned from this course to research and daily communication.



Marwa Ali

Department

Comparative Pathobiology

Homeland

Egypt

How did you get interested in your field of study?

My interest in epidemiology stems from my diverse educational and professional journey. I started as a veterinarian, cultivating a robust understanding of animal health. Motivated by a passion for mathematics and statistics, I pursued a master's degree in quantitative veterinary Epidemiology at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. Following my master's degree, I was privileged to work as a National Epidemiology Consultant at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). These experiences paved the way for my current pursuit: a Ph.D. in Epidemiology and Public Health.

What did you find most beneficial in ENGL 620?

English 620 has had a profound impact on enhancing my communication and presentation skills. I began the course with apprehensions about my accent and pronunciation but grew more confident and precise over time. The guidance and mentorship of my instructor, Olivia Anderson, and my tutor, Emma Richards, played an instrumental role in this transformation.



Jianghui "Rebecca" Liu

Department

Civil Engineering

Homeland

Macao, China

How did you get interested in your field of study?

My undergraduate major was environmental engineering, and one of the main sectors of environmental research is air quality. Popular air research is usually conducted to define outdoor/atmospheric air quality problems, but people stay indoors much more than outdoors. Thus, I am very interested in the potential hazardous/pollutants that may affect indoor air quality.

What aspects of communicating with undergraduate students in ENGL 620 did you find helpful and why?

The most helpful aspect of communicating with undergraduate students in English 620 is that I gained more confidence for when I need to communicate with undergraduate students in my future TA jobs. Most of the English 620 volunteer undergraduates are from humanities and social science majors. But most of the TAs are from engineering and science majors. If I can communicate with students from different majors, I think I can communicate better with students in my future classes.